

STEPHANIE E. ASHE
MASTERS CANDIDATE
SPRING 2007

HERITAGE PLANNING:
APPROACHES TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND CONTESTATION IN
GRONINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS

NETWORK FOR EUROPEAN AND UNITED STATES REGIONAL AND URBAN STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN &
RIJKSUNIVERSITEIT AT GRONINGEN, NETHERLANDS

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION.....	3
METHODOLOGY	3
1.0 HERITAGE PLANNING	4
1.1 MOTIVATION	5
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION	5
1.3 STUDY AREA	5
1.4 ACTORS	7
2.0 ARGUMENTS FOR HERITAGE PLANNING.....	8
2.1 DUTCH PROCESSES TO HERITAGE PLANNING	8
2.2 THE ECONOMICS OF HERITAGE PLANNING.....	9
2.3 SOCIOLOGY OF COMMUNITIES	12
2.4 DESIGN STANDARDS OF COMMUNITIES.....	13
2.5 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HERITAGE PLANNING.....	15
3.0 HISTORY OF HET BLAUWE DORP.....	16
3.1 1919-1950s.....	17
3.2 1960s-1999.....	18
3.3 1999-PRESENT	20
4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....	27
WORKS CITED.....	30
WORKS CONSULTED.....	30
WEBSITES CONSULTED	31

ABSTRACT

Heritage planning has become a much debated topic in recent decades. In the Netherlands, governmental, non-governmental, and private sectors are heavily involved and have helped shape the existing and future urban landscape. This paper describes a small community in Groningen, known as 'Het Blauwe Dorp', explaining processes, policies, and how public contestation influences how heritage planning is (or is not) carried out. This paper seeks to understand the tension between the need for new standards and technologies and how preserving the cultural past is managed. While the Dutch have historically relied on their consensus system to ease tension, this system is falling by the wayside and causing more tension than before.

INTRODUCTION

Heritage planning has long been embraced and contested in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a country rich with history and almost always near the forefront of innovation and technological advances. The history of the Dutch as a consensus society has always helped to ease tensions caused by issues of heritage planning. However in recent years, the tides are changing and a hierarchical system appears to be moving in. These changes are affecting how the processes of heritage planning are handled and seemingly are challenging the residents and their wants and needs.

METHODOLOGY

In order to more clearly understand the underlying tensions found in heritage planning, a case study was conducted on a small neighborhood in the Netherlands. Data was collected by observation, research, and resident interviews.

- *Identified case study neighborhood*—In Groningen, Netherlands, a neighborhood known as Het Blauwe Dorp or ‘The Blue Village’, is an ideal place to observe the processes of heritage planning.
- *Researched community history and heritage planning in the Netherlands*—since 1919, the Blauwe Dorp has witnessed the processes of heritage planning in a variety of situations.
- *Interviewed community members*—the members of the community were willing to engage in conversation about their neighborhood and their views and attitudes on heritage planning and because no history has formally been recorded on the community, this paper also seeks to tell the community’s story.
- *Researched laws and regulations regarding heritage planning in the Netherlands*—the Netherlands has a long history of laws and regulations in respect to heritage planning and the preservation or alteration of older structures.

1.0 HERITAGE PLANNING

Heritage planning can be described as: 1) the careful management of a community’s historic resources; 2) as the avoidance of wasted resources by careful planning and use; and 3) as the thrifty reuse of available resources. Heritage planning is the idea of using or managing historic resources with thrift or prudence and avoiding their waste or needless expenditure. It is the concept of reducing expenses through the use of those historic resources. It is the idea of preserving some of the historic culture which has shaped the built environment. Yet, heritage planning is also the result of a tense dichotomy between the form and function of places (Ashworth, 1991). These two phenomena are always in constant flux—function shapes form—but these same functions rapidly change and it is hard for form to adjust to function’s swift transformations. Thus, heritage planning aims to ease the tension between the form of a place and the ever changing function that citizens place upon it. It should *manage* the changing form with innovative design

concepts while holding on to the original purpose of the place. This is important because the neighborhood still functions as a neighborhood and the residents of the neighborhood want to hold fast to past while improving their living conditions.

1.1 MOTIVATION

The aforementioned tension between form and function is a direct result of the tension between the past and the future. Advances in technology and the standard of living have put pressure to update and improve “out-dated” buildings. While most would agree with the need to change to accommodate new technologies and preferences, many also want to bring parts of the past into the future. Heritage planning is one way in which both needs can be met, provided the public plays a key role. Community involvement is essential because a city’s inhabitants are those directly affected by the processes and decisions made. Since decisions to alter historic structures are typically irreversible, the involvement should be from the onset of decisions and should be through every step of the processes.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

Using Het Blauwe Dorp as one example, this paper seeks identify the processes that have either caused tension or been put into place to ease the tensions. Two questions will be used to address these issues in the research. First, what is the process of citizen input within the realm of heritage planning in the Netherlands? Secondly, how are those citizen views embedded in policies and the decision making processes?

1.3 STUDY AREA

Het Blauwe Dorp or the “Blue Village” was built between the years 1919 and 1921 in response to a growing demand for housing and an inadequate supply. The development



Exhibit 1.0—Het Blauwe Dorp, Circa 1932.
 Source: Het Blauwe Dorp. February, 2007.
www.hetblauwedorp.nl



Exhibit 1.1—Het Blauwe Dorp Aerial, Circa 2005. Source:
 Google Earth. February, 2007

was the first outside of the central ring of Groningen in an area known as Oosterparkwijk. The entire development was modeled after Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City concept, which was a popular, but short lived movement focused on making cities green and beautiful (See *Exhibit 1.0*). Once finished, this small neighborhood of only seven streets had eighteen Sluice-Grate houses, with four homes under each roof, which were surrounded by many edge houses (See *Exhibit 1.1*). The structures were constructed of red barge under a hip-roof cap and covered with red clay tiles. The surrounding edge houses were also constructed in 1919, but not in succession. Therefore, later infill introduced a striking mixture of themed architectural styles to make the area a bit more unique and interesting. For example, the rooflines of the edge houses vary, adding to the uniqueness of the community. This unique and beautiful style of architecture, has given Het Blauwe Dorp the nickname, “The Pearl of Oosterparkwijk”.

1.4 ACTORS

Since the construction of Het Blauwe Dorp, the community has experienced many conflicts and resolutions in each conflict, and many actors have played major and minor roles. At the highest level is the national government with the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. These two ministries are responsible for designating heritage sites and providing the regulations thereof. Once they designate a structure or structures as heritage sites, those sites receive the fullest protection from alterations or demolition.

Next, there is the local government, known as the Groningen Municipality Council. This council is responsible for local regulations and legislation pertaining to heritage planning. The council also approves or denies all building, demolition, and alteration permits which directly affect potential heritage sites. Political parties, aldermen, and mayors have a major role in how votes are cast on particular issues and having one such official back an issue can almost guarantee its success. Housing corporations also play an important role. The most recent housing corporation involved in this particular study is the agency, Nijestee. As the owner of Het Blauwe Dorp, Nijestee has a financial investment in the community and wants to make the highest return it can off its property. The next actor to play a vital role in the fate of Het Blauwe Dorp is the community group known as The Blauwe Dorp Residential Commission. This group has been instrumental over the decades in ensuring that the voices of the residents are heard and taken into consideration with any decisions affecting the community. Lastly, the media has played a key part in ensuring that Het Blauwe Dorp and its happenings stay at the forefront of local Dutch

politics as well as in the minds of Dutch residents throughout Groningen, by producing news slips, newspaper articles, and documentaries on the community.

2.0 ARGUMENTS FOR HERITAGE PLANNING

2.1 DUTCH PROCESSES TO HERITAGE PLANNING

In the Netherlands, at the National level, policies tend to focus on creating the conditions for economic and functional survival of the registered structures. It does not focus on solely preserving structures in a permanent state of existence. Additionally, it is not only the national government which is involved in the conservation and management of these buildings; private parties, such as non-governmental organization (NGO's) are also concerned with these structures. Many updates have been made to the Dutch policies on heritage planning, the most recent being in 2005 when the "Action Programme for Space and Culture" was established. This policy was geared at integrating modern architecture into the world of conservation. It also encouraged cultural heritage to be considered as a valuable part of the Dutch built environment. Additionally, due to the Dutch democratic processes, all parties, both private and public, are involved and more or less responsible in the decisions of heritage planning. The policy acknowledges that cultural and historical values strengthen the identity of a community, city, and region.

The list of partners in the processes include, but are not limited to; government; advocacy, policy, and trade groups; capital providers; community based groups; academic institutions; private consultants; and intermediaries. The highest authority is the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM). VROM seeks to:

- Promote the right to choose and influence of tenants and buyers;
- Ensure that sufficient inexpensive housing facilities are available for lower-income groups and persons with specific needs like the elderly and disabled (promoting home ownership is a part of this aim as well);
- Promote the housing and care facilities that satisfy individual demands;
- Renew, maintain, and improve cities, strengthening the economic base of towns and cities through the differentiation of the housing supply, and promoting a proper living environment;
- Promote the development of sustainable residential environments, affecting the environment as little as possible.

These goals inherently support heritage planning through a number of channels—economics, sociology, urban design, and community development—all of which will be explained in further detail in the following sections.

2.2 THE ECONOMICS OF HERITAGE PLANNING

On the surface, heritage planning appears to make sense because it offers the reuse of materials as well as a sustainable solution to housing, but it also exudes to a much deeper level. The economist John Maynard Keynes once said that, “In the long run we’re all dead.” While this is certainly true for living beings, it is not true for the built environment around us. For heritage planning, in the long run, economic impact is far less important than its educational, environmental, cultural, aesthetic, historical, and social impacts. However, in the short run, it is one of the only tools that will work well to keep the built environment alive and functioning. This, however, does not imply or suggest that the economic arguments for heritage planning are more important than the aesthetic, cultural, social, political or historical ones. In the grand scheme of things, the economic arguments are probably less important than all the rest. It is doubtful that in

twenty years, many people really care about any tax revenues generated by a renovation project, or the jobs created by the conversion of an old factory into office space. But rather, these buildings are valued because of their beauty, because of the people who lived and worked there, and because of their relationship to the development of the surrounding culture. They are valued because in a very tangible way they help people understand who they are, where they came from, and where they are going. It has become a problem of public/private goods and since the Dutch consensus society is falling by the wayside, the private goods are taking control and not always making decisions in the best interest of the public goods.

Unfortunately, these arguments do not hold as much merit in the eyes of those who control the future of heritage resources. These controllers are usually property owners, bankers, elected officials, economic development directors, business people, planning and zoning officers, real estate brokers, and taxpayers. Money talks, and when it comes to a shortage of buildable space, like in the example of Groningen, it speaks volumes. Many new developments must be built where old developments now exist, thereby threatening precious heritage resources as well as the way of life for many residents. Whose responsibility is it to protect said resources? It can be argued that it is everybody's responsibility; that all the players care about the community in one way or another, and therefore they all have a stake in ensuring that fewer historic resources are lost.

Traditionally, historic neighborhoods house a mix of household incomes, most of which are of the moderate- to low-income status. Years of trying to house low-income residents has shown that “people living in neighborhoods [to which] they feel attached (rather than afraid of) does work, and historic homes add significantly to that sense of attachment” (Rypkema, 1998, pp. 63). This attachment is deeply rooted in the sociology of communities. In addition to mix of incomes, historical neighborhoods have significant and ongoing economic impacts beyond the preservation/rehabilitation projects themselves. While the rehabilitation of historic buildings certainly creates construction jobs, the economic benefits of preserving historic resources go beyond the boundaries of neighborhood. In the United States, it has been found that other benefits are the formation of new businesses, the stimulation of private investment, the stimulation of tourism, an increase in property values, an enhanced quality of life and community pride, the creation of new jobs, the creation of compatible land-use patterns, an increase in property and sales taxes, and the dilution of poverty and deterioration (Rypkema, 1999).

While virtually every rehabilitation project is unique, there is no standard by which it can be determined if it will be more or less expensive than new construction. However, much research over the last few decades has rendered four reliable principles in favor of the rehabilitation, preservation, reconstruction, or restoration of structures. First, when a complete renovation is required, it is typically more cost efficient to build a new structure. However, the new structure will almost inevitably be one of vastly lower quality and of shorter life expectancy than the quality rehabilitation of a historic structure. Take for instance the Blauwe Dorp, it was only meant to last twenty-five years, and yet

after eighty-eight years, and a few renovations, the buildings are still standing and are quite livable. On the other hand, most modern structures will not last more than twenty years. Secondly, for comparable quality structures, renovations is often less expensive than new construction. Thirdly, square-foot for square-foot, rehabilitation is typically a cost-competitive alternative. Lastly, when considering quality, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse will nearly always be a cost-competitive alternative.

Another argument for heritage planning is that by reusing current facilities, only slight extra costs are imposed upon the existing infrastructure and services to the city. Additionally, a growing body of research suggests that where trust and social networks flourish, individuals, firms, neighborhoods, and even nations prosper economically. When carefully developed, heritage planning can be the bridge that links the aforementioned economics with the following sociology to create these vibrant, thriving communities.

2.3 SOCIOLOGY OF COMMUNITIES

In terms of heritage planning, sociology becomes the antithesis of economics and demonstrates viewpoints from the opposite end of the spectrum. Sociology takes on the role of observing the relationships of people with their environment. In this way, community can be conceived as an active process through which individuals and groups strive to realize their potential within their environment (Graham, 2006). Sociologists are interested in the activity of spaces, the image formation, distance and space perception, territorial defenses, proxemic behaviors, lifestyle, social stratification, a person's identification with place, and so on (Buttimer and Seaman, 1980). Therefore, places

become “things to be consumed, able to provide people with certain satisfactions, closely connected to their sense of identity. Instead of determining how people live, as used to be supposed, places serve as arenas for the realization of particular lifestyles, and are constructed socially to deliver what is required of them” (Urry, pp.186). In the case of Het Blauwe Dorp, over the last eighty-five years, the working class citizens have created their own images of place and have associated the existing buildings and infrastructure with their own sense of community. For them, the two go hand-in-hand, and the buildings of Het Blauwe Dorp are as much a part of their personal identity as their own hair and eye color. The processes of heritage planning have helped to save the sociological aspects of Het Blauwe Dorp and have strengthened and maintained active citizenship and in addition to the residents aspirations and values as residents of Groningen.

2.4 DESIGN STANDARDS OF COMMUNITIES

Urban design has become a vital part of city planning as it helps create livable, beautiful, and valuable places to live, work, and recreate. Many cities have realized the importance of design standards as, “Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences...every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings” (Lynch, pp.1). Many of the new standards in urban design are based off past designs. Many new developments have reverted back to the Garden City design scheme, one of which Het Blauwe Dorp can boast of already having. A resident should be able to establish a well-balanced relationship between themselves and the outside world; therefore a good environmental image should create a

sense of emotional security. Moreover, good design should stray from creating the fear that comes with disorientation and should create areas that are not only familiar but distinctive as well. The residents of Het Blauwe Dorp feel their surroundings are not only familiar, but distinctive and unique to the City of Groningen. They have interpreted the urban design of their community as a positive one that does foster community and a feeling of belonging.

The residents of Het Blauwe Dorp have spent much time, effort and energy in maintaining a community balance. Developers should recognize the existence of these processes in order to properly intervene with new designs. “The ultimate responsibility of community designers is to decide, in each case, whether to work with self-regulating processes, and thus to correct and improve – in effect to maintain the existing path – or to join the forces leading toward a new organization through radical changes” (Lozano, pp.78). Had Nijestee attempted to join forces and work with already existing processes within the community instead of impose radical changes, much of the conflict could have been minimized or even avoided all together.

Planning and design activities are valid agents of change. They are among the mechanisms for regulating and organizing human settlements. However, it is the processes to regulations which are of utmost concern in regards to heritage planning. Urban design could be the demise of cultural heritage if not correctly regulated from the onset of the residents need for community.

2.5 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HERITAGE PLANNING

Community development is a field in which cultural heritage can be regulated and by which entire communities can be made sustainable. In order to properly work, community development must be demand driven, arising from grassroots community organizing. Most importantly, adequate and ongoing monetary resources must be available and accessible not only to carry out individual development projects but also to sustain a comprehensive program of neighborhood development or redevelopment. Nijestee and the City of Groningen are the sources of such funding and Het Blauwe Dorp's leaders should have built strong and direct ties with these two agencies. Unfortunately, no strong relationships were formed, therefore a break down occurred and conflicts arose. Het Blauwe Dorp established itself as unique by coining the phrase "We are Oosterparkians!" This not only establishes a self identity, but demonstrates a personal identity to a particular community within Groningen.

Within this community, many social networks and systems have developed and have enabled the residents "to navigate [their] way around the demands and contingencies of everyday living" (Crow and Allan, pp.2). Additionally, it has provided the community with an abundance of social capital. Social capital refers to the connections among individuals, "the social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, pp.19) and it consists "of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the member of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible" (Cohen and Prusak, pp.4). Moreover, social capital "is not just the sum of the institution

which underpins a society—it is the glue that holds them together” (The World Bank, 1999).

Het Blauwe Dorp has all of the aforesaid aspects of a good community for they have worked hard to maintain and sustain their community. Research has shown that communities with a good 'stock' of social capital are more likely to benefit from lower crime figures, better health, higher educational achievement, and better economic growth as has been the case in Het Blauwe Dorp. They have emphasized self-help, mutual support, the build up of neighborhood integration, the development of neighborhood capacities for problem solving and self-representation, and the promotion of collective action to bring their preferences for their housing to the attention of political decision-makers. It is through these processes of community development that heritage planning has been supported by the residents and has been able to sustain and thrive in Het Blauwe Dorp.

3.0 HISTORY OF HET BLAUWE DORP

Het Blauwe Dorp has been at the center of Dutch heritage planning almost from its founding. Het Blauwe Dorp was designed and built due to an increasing housing demand at the turn of the 20th Century. This eruption in construction marked the beginning of the social housing era in the Netherlands. Much of the housing was being built on the eastern edge of the city, just outside of where the fortress walls used to stand. Local S. J. Bouma created the street plan for what became known as Oosterparkwijk, or the “east plan”. This street plan was then divided into three villages and denoted by colors: red, green, and blue. The City Director of the time, Mulock Houwer, was put in charge of

interpreting the street plan and creating the three separate neighborhoods. Houwer based his design of the blue section on Ebenezer Howard's theory of the *Garden City*; the idea of sustaining "a healthy, natural, and economic combination of town and country life" through a balance of work and leisure (Howard, pp. 51). Howard's aim was to establish a harmonious relationship between man and nature.

Architecturally, Het Blauwe Dorp community was designed with sluice-gate truss houses surrounded by smaller edge houses. As was also central in a Garden city, green spaces of parks and gardens were designed throughout. Initially, the principal idea was to have semi-permanent construction of the structures that could be demolished and rebuilt after a period of twenty-five years. Fortunately, the quality of the structures was above par and after eighty-eight years they are still standing.

3.1 1919-1950s

The central houses were built in 1919 (See Exhibits 2.0 and 2.1). They were constructed of red barge under a hip-roof cap and covered with red clay tiles. There are four houses under each of the roof caps. The surrounding edge houses also began construction in 1919, but not in succession. Therefore, later infill



Het Blauwe Dorp. Circa 1930.

Source: *Het Blauwe Dorp. February, 2007.*

www.hetblauwedorp.nl

afforded the opportunity to create a striking architectural mix of edge houses, making the area a bit more unique and interesting. Houwer playfully designed the rooflines and

vaults of the edge houses to be different, adding to the variation of the community from the street view.



*Het Blauwe Dorp. January, 2007.
Source: Stephanie Ashe, January, 2007.*

Thus the Blauwe Dorp became a quaint garden village on the edge of Groningen. While small in scale with only seven streets, the neighborhood quickly became an ideal place to live for the working class. At the time, the houses were managed by the Central Housing Management (CWB) of the Municipality of Groningen. As

previously mentioned, it was expected that the houses be demolished after twenty-five years. However, in the 1950s, as it was more economically advantageous, the structures were adapted to the new housing standards by means of modernization and renovation. In addition, at the time there were strong proponents for preservation of the village.

3.2 1960s-1999

After the renovations, the Blauwe Dorp was sold to the Housing Construction Association (WVG), a private housing corporation. In the mid 1970s, the central farm houses (the sluice-gate trusses) were renovated to meet the housing standards of the day. In the 1980s, the sluice-gate truss houses came up for discussion again as a new law would allow housing corporations to raise the rents on renovated housing units. Because the central farm houses had been recently renovated, the WVG wanted to raise the rents to equal that of new development houses, which they claimed were of the same quality.

Naturally, this led to protests by the inhabitants who did not feel that the two were equal. This conflict went all the way to the City Council which eventually decided in favor of the inhabitants after determining that the modernization of the structures was of poor quality.

The WVG inspected the structures again and found architectural condition of the houses to be in poor condition and resolved that it would be much too expensive to remedy the weaknesses. Moreover, they found that, many more houses could be built where the sluice-gate farm houses stood. The WVG then sited the houses for demolition.

The views of the current residents were not included in this debate and so a multi-year battle then ensued for the fate of the farm houses. In the favor of the Blauwe Dorp, the then alderman of Spatial Scheduling, Ypke Gietema, fought to save the structures from demolition. To the relief of the residents, the city council eventually decided to save the farm houses and renovate them using city and federal funds. With this round of renovations, all of the structural flaws were repaired—the walls were joined back together, the paint was finished, the tiles were cleaned, etc—bringing the houses up to modern standards. After these renovations, the farm houses were put on the National Monument List and permanently saved from demolition.

Although the farm houses were saved, the surrounding edge houses were only safe until 1999 when they were to come up for discussion under the twenty-five year law. Now it had to be decided whether to demolish or renovate the edge houses.

3.3 1999-PRESENT

The Citizen's Commission and the residents originally supported preserving the edge houses as is, so as to maintain them as small and affordable. However, the housing cooperation and the City did not want to renovate because the construction of new housing could easily accommodate more people more comfortably. After much debate and discussion among all the parties, a compromise was reached where the edge houses would become partially combined to provide both small and large profitable rented housing. In addition to rental housing, part of the district would be sold for individual home ownership. Most importantly for the residents, the aesthetics and character of the edge houses would be kept in tact by preserving their architectural integrity.



*Het Blauwe Dorp, January 2007.
Source: Stephanie Ashe, January 2007.*



*Het Blauwe Dorp: January 2007
Source: Stephanie Ashe, January 2007*

The housing corporation, which had now become Nijestee (WVG sold Het Blauwe Dorp to Nijestee some years before), finished the renovation on seven of the edge houses by 2004. Of the seven houses renovated, four were joined together to make two larger houses and the other three

were given additions on the backside. Ideally, the rest of the edge houses would have begun renovations shortly thereafter. However, in the beginning of 2005, Nijestee announced that the cost for the renovations of the seven edge houses had been grossly underestimated and cost nearly 50 percent more than projected. Nijestee then argued that demolition of the rest of the edge houses would be the most economically advantageous solution. The Citizen's Committee once again began protesting the proposed demolition.

Nijestee hired an architect to design the new concept and in September of 2005, a three dimensional presentation of the proposal was distributed by Nijestee to all interested parties on the Zernike education complex of the Rijks Universiteit. The residents of the Blouwe Dorp were not pleased with the model houses presented



Het Blauwe Dorp: January 2007
Source: Stephanie Ashe, January 2007

at this time because the concept completely altered the look and feel of their neighborhood by making it too modern. The residents then worked hard to stop the plans from going forward by sending letters to all of Groningen's political parties in hopes of gaining support.

On February 8, 2006, the Groningen City Council announced its position on the fate of the edge houses. A majority of the Council was for the conservation of the edge houses while only two political parties—the two largest—supported demolition. One of those

parties used to be for the conservation of Het Blauwe Dorp. Two the political parties supported the preservation of the edge houses provided Nijestee be used as a consult for the renovation project. One week later, the entire Council met with the intention of bringing the all parties to consensus. At this time, two of the parties refused to sign the motion brought to the table and so no official motion was obtained. While this is not unusual, this particular situation arose because the two groups refusing to sign comprise a majority of the Council, making a consensus of any sort impossible to reach.



Het Blauwe Dorp: January 2007
Source: Stephanie Ashe, January 2007

To further complicate the situation, municipal elections were held on March 1, 2006. This election represented an opportunity to change the political make-up of the City Council and of the Aldermen, thus altering how the votes would be cast for the preservation or demolition of the edge houses. At this point, the media became very involved and hosted a television poll on the topic of “How to Treat District Renewal”. Many of the current Aldermen, as well as other politicians, supported the preservation and renewal of the district. Prior to the election day Nijestee announced it would no longer seek plans for demolition and would in fact help preserve the neighborhood.

Nonetheless, Nijestee discretely continued to create demolition plans for Het Blauwe Dorp. On April 28, 2006, the residents of the edge houses received a notice announcing that their tenancy had been terminated and they would need to vacate their homes within one year. On May 23, 2006, the Residential Commission organized a tribute, which the local politicians and other interested parties attended. On hand were the local town historian, the foremost professor of heritage planning at the university, and a local architect. These three locals emphasized the historical and cultural value of Het Blauwe Dorp as a community and as a garden village. The rally was deemed a huge success and created allies not only in the communities surrounding Het Blauwe Dorp, but throughout Groningen. September was being declared 'Het Blauwe Dorp Month' and the edge houses were placed on the docket to be given monument status.

On July 28, 2006, the Residential Commission received an e-mail stating that Nijestee would be submitting a construction license claim after the summer holiday and when the City received it, they would be informing the residents via a newsletter. After this e-mail, the Residential Commission delayed its request to put the edge houses up for monument status and decided to wait until after the summer holiday when the city would be back in session. The e-mail was only a ruse, however, because over the holiday Nijestee had actually put in a request for demolition of the edge houses. The residents found out about the demolition request in the newspaper and took immediate action to stop the process. In Dutch law, requests are reviewed on a first come, first serve basis, and since the demolition request was received prior to the request for monument status, the outcome was not expected to favor Het Blauwe Dorp's residents.

On August 16, 2006, the newspaper announced that Nijestee had completed the demolition and construction applications. One week later, the application for a tree removal license for twenty-one trees was completed. Meanwhile, the Residential Commission was not ready to admit defeat. They hired *Heemschut*, an association for the protection of culture and monuments in the Netherlands, to fill out the urban application for monument status on the edge houses. The application was submitted on September 2, 2006, and was supported by *Cuypersgenoodschap*, a group for the conservation of architectural heritage built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Once the monument request was filed by the Heemschut association, the demolition, cap and construction applications by Nijestee were halted to await the ruling of the Monument Commission. The Monument Commission is a group of independent Commissioners whose charge is to make unbiased decisions for monument status of historically important structures.

While the Monument Commission debated throughout September, the Residential Commission went around Groningen and collected signatures in support of the monument status application. Thousands of signatures were gathered and then handed over to the City Council. On September 30, 2006, Het Blauwe Dorp was visited by ‘The Friends of Groningen’, a foundation that supports the interests of Groningen as a center of the Northern Netherlands and as an important historical city. The group was shown around the Village and became very enthusiastic concerning the preservation of Het Blauwe Dorp. In the Friends of Groningen’s monthly bulletins, much attention was

focused on Het Blauwe Dorp, helping to build more support for the preservation of the edge houses.

On December 20, 2006, Het Blauwe Dorp received news that the Monument Commission had insured a recommendation favoring monument status for the edge houses. However, trust was only a small step toward making the edge houses monuments. The final decision was to be made by the City Council.

With the recommendation of the Monument Commission, the City Council met to discuss the two options for Het Blauwe Dorp on January 10, 2007. The residents were somewhat disappointed with the meeting as most of the attention and discussion focused around the first option to demolish the houses, not around the second option to grant them monument status. Eventually, a decision was made not to demolish. That was followed by a heated debate around the issue of monument status. Through the discussion of the second option, a third option developed to make Het Blauwe Drop a self-controlled community. At this point in the meeting, the Alderman requested to table both issues until the next meeting, as some of the involved parties wanted to examine this new third option in more detail.

On January 31, 2007, at the City Council meeting, a motion was granted for an independent party to do research on the feasibility of the third option of making Het Blauwe Dorp a self-control entity. The motion was adopted and a full report is expected to be presented to the City Council on May 1, 2007.

In March of 2007, the City Council granted monument status to Het Blauwe Dorp and, with the help of Nijestee, the residents of Het Blauwe Dorp wanted to create a feasible modernization plan for the edge houses. The residents acknowledged that in order to be economically feasible, some of the units will need to be sold into private homeownership and not be kept as rental units. However, according to Nijestee, the necessary renovations would be too expensive and lead to a greater loss along with higher rents and buying prices. Nijestee simultaneously announced that since the houses have been added to National Monument List, they would be selling the houses into the private market. This could prove to be detrimental to the current residents as some may not be able to buy the houses on an individual basis and therefore would be forced from their homes and neighborhood.

The third option has now become a top priority for the Residential Commission and the residents. The residents want to keep their community a working class neighborhood and not allow it to succumb to the forces of the free market which could possibly force the residents out of the neighborhood. The Residential Commission has been working hard to rally political support for the self-control of Het Blauwe Dorp. The community would then have the houses within their possession and could sell or rent them out to the working class residents at affordable rates. This option would ensure the social management (recruitment of new occupants, the domestic regulation, etc), the technical management (maintenance to the houses), and the financial control (collection of

contribution, hiring, etc). It is even possible to assign one or more of these tasks to a third party (e.g., a landlord).

As of April, 2007, the fate of the edge houses and the residents of Het Blauwe Dorp is still unknown. The long battle will seemingly be over on May 1, 2007, when the City Council will decide whether or not to allow Het Blauwe Dorp to be a self-controlling entity.

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Dutch are known for being a consensus society. In communication theory, "consensus decision making" occurs only when everyone examines an issue and eventually agrees that solution X is the best option given the constraints of the situation. In a consensus society, as long as people reach a "consensus," no one else has a legitimate right to complain, and so most do not. Dissenters simply have to accept what a majority of their fellow citizens' desire and have voted to support. This can be seen throughout the decades of struggle for the Blauwe Dorp. In most cases, a compromise was reached to satisfy or benefit all parties involved. However, in recent years, it seems to be changing into a more of a hierarchical system whereby certain groups of people make decisions with or without the consent of the majority. The community had to insist on being involved in recent decisions and were not readily invited to participate in the happenings of their own communities. In a true consensus society, they would have at least been invited to participate in the decision making process. If they had not voiced concern, the housing corporation and the local government would have made decisions that directly affected the residents, and most likely in a negative way. In this particular

case study, the citizens appear to view heritage planning in a positive light, by supporting and initiating movements to keep their community intact both socially and aesthetically. From what can be observed the new tendencies could hurt the heritage planning movement as not all major political parties support heritage planning outside of city centers. While the consensus system did not always favor the side of heritage planning, it did ensure that such an issue was taken into account. If other communities around Groningen would like to keep their heritage intact, it would require the entire community to get involved and make themselves heard (much like the Blauwe Dorp) because that is the only way that they will have a chance of survival in this changing tide of citizen participation. As far as heritage planning is concerned, it would be advantageous if the system reverted back to a true consensus society—not one that has it as a formality—but one that truly involves all interested and affected parties to help keep tension at a minimum. For the Blauwe Dorp, this new trend implies that they might always have to be fighting to keep their community together and constantly enforcing the idea of heritage planning.

Seemingly, the most effective method used by the public to get their opinions and views heard was marketing. The media was used in several instances to rally outside support for Het Blauwe Dorp. The Residential Commission found supporters from the university, the local television stations, the local newspapers, local celebrities, and many of the local political parties. They organized protests, had professional documentaries made, and brought in a popular poet to voice his support for the protection of the edge houses. The marketing of Het Blauwe Dorp ultimately saved all of the architectural integrity of the

neighborhood as well as helped to keep it a working class neighborhood with affordable housing near the city center.

What is the process of citizen input within the realm of heritage planning in the Netherlands and how are citizen views embedded in policies and the decision making processes? While arguments can be made for two systems of processes—consensus vs. hierarchical—in the discipline of heritage planning, the system of consensus building appears to be the most effective at achieving both the preservation of culture and the advancement of society. The hierarchical systems tends to be more a one-man-show and not everyone is asked to participate or to influence decisions made that affect their lives. Inherently, these types of processes are included in the consensus system. The consensus system allow for compromises and agreements. Consensus building processes afford the opportunity for heritage planning to be incorporated in the decision making processes, given that some party wants it included. If not, than heritage planning does not need to occur because a consensus of people does not want it. While making such compromises is not always the easiest task, it does tend to keep the majority of parties involved and prevents unnecessary community backlash from occurring as was the case in recent years with Het Blauwe Dorp community.

WORKS CITED

- Ashworth, G.J. 1991. "Heritage planning: conservation as the management of urban change". Geo Pers; the Netherlands.
- Buttimer, Anne and David Seaman. 1980. "The Human Experience of Space and Place". Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cohen, Don and Laurence Prusak. 2001. "In Good Company: how social capital makes organization work". Harvard Business School Press.
- Crow, G. and Allen, G. 1994. "Community Life: An Introduction to Local Social Relations". Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead.
- Graham, Day. 2006. "Community and Everyday Life". Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Howard, Ebenezer. 1902. "Garden Cities of To-Morrow". London: Faber and Faber.
- Lozano, Eduardo E. 1990. "Community Design and the Culture of Cities". New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lynch, Kevin. 1960. "Image of the City". Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. "Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community". Simon & Schuster; New Ed edition.
- Rypkema, Donovan D. 2005. "The Economics of Historic Preservation: A community leader's guide". National Trust for Historic preservation; Washington D.C.
- Urry, John. 1995. "Consuming Places". Routledge, London and New York.
- The World Bank. 1999. www.worldbank.org.

WORKS CONSULTED

- Ashworth, G.J. and Peter Howard. 2000. "European Heritage Planning and Management". Intellect Publishers; The Netherlands.
- Ashworth, G.J. and J.E. Tunbridge. 1999. "Old cities, new pasts: Heritage planning in selected cities of Central Europe". *GeoJournal*, (49): 105-116.
- Cohen, A.P. 1985. "The Symbolic Construction of Community". London: Tavistock and Routledge.

Eade 1997: "Capacity Building: An approach to people-centered development". Oxford: Oxfam.

Florida, Richard. 2002. "The Rise of the Creative Class: An how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life". Perseus Books Group; 1st ed.

Frazer, Elizabeth. 2000. "Problems of Communitarian Politics: Unity and conflict". Oxford University Pres, USA.

Graham, Brian; G.J. Ashworth; and J.E. Tunbridge. 2000. "A Geography of Heritage: power, culture, and economy". A Hodder Arnold Publication, The Netherlands.

Jacobs, Jane. 1961. "The Death and Life of Great American Cities". Random House; Reissue edition; 2002.

Lindeman, Eduard. 1921. "The community: An introduction to the study of community leadership and organization". Association Press, 1921.

Tyler, Norman. 2000. "Historic Preservation". W.W. Norton and Company; New York.

WEBSITES CONSULTED

Het Blauwe Dorp. March, 2007. www.hetblauwedorp.nl. Groningen, the Netherlands.

Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment. February, 2007. www.vrom.nl.

Nijestee. February, 2007. www.nijestee.nl. Groningen, the Netherlands.